Help for Dairy Farmers; Research on Maine Blueberries, Potatoes and Forests Passes House

Wednesday, October 07 2009

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Mike Michaud announced that funding he helped secure was included in the FY 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Conference Report, which passed the House today. Michaud secured $450,000 for the University of Maine Cooperative Extension for a potato integrated pest management program and $200,000 for research on the sustainable production and processing of Maine lowbush blueberries. Michaud also worked with a coalition of members of Congress from across the country to secure $4,841,000 for wood utilization research and $295,000 for invasive plant research, which is conducted at the University of Maine.

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“All of these projects will directly help Maine based industries,” said Michaud. “Forest products, wild blueberries, and potatoes provide our state with thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in economic activity. This funding will support the success of these industries that are so crucial to our economy in Maine.”

In addition to funding these important local projects, the Agriculture Appropriations Act also responds to the crisis plaguing Maine dairy farmers, by including aid for farmers who are struggling with historically low milk prices. On October 1st, Michaud met with U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack to discuss the national dairy price crisis and the impact it’s having on Maine dairy farmers. Secretary Vilsack discussed the $350 million dairy assistance program in the FY 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Conference Report, which includes $290 million for direct payments to financially hard-pressed dairy producers.

“I appreciate that Secretary Vilsack made a commitment to expedite the process of disbursing dairy assistance payments to individual farmers when I met with him. This will directly help Maine dairy farmers during these difficult times,” said Michaud.

More information on funding for Maine projects in the bill that Michaud helped secure can be found below.

$4,841,000 for University of Maine, Wood Utilization Research (WUR): This project would promote economic development and environmental protections in the Maine forest industry by generating new knowledge and technologies necessary to balance the sustainable use of our Nation's forest resources with the need to maintain a domestic forest products industry. This program funds 13 WUR Centers that generate the new knowledge and technologies necessary to balance the sustainable use of our Nation's forest resources with the need to maintain a domestic forest products industry.

The USDA Special Grant program for Wood Utilization Research is an extremely worthwhile project that supports wood products research and outreach through a dozen universities spread across the country from Alaska to Mississippi and Maine to Washington. This USDA Special Grant program has been authorized and funded by Congress since 1985.

WUR is the only federal program that supports regionally and nationally focused university research that provides

creative and innovative science, technology, and advanced business practices that:

- Enhance domestic and global competitiveness of the U.S. wood products industry;

- Foster sustainable and environmentally acceptable wood product manufacturing and forest operations; and

- Lead to greater and more efficient use of renewable wood-based materials.

A major benefit of the USDA Special Grant has been the flexibility of the WUR Centers to rapidly address critical regional or national research needs. The WUR program has a remarkable track record for leveraging additional funds from States, industry, private groups.

The WUR Centers research is vital to maintaining the jobs and livelihoods of millions of people. WUR Centers emphasize strengthening the current workforce and developing a future workforce with advanced skills through their research and educational programs.

Over 2.1 million Americans are directly employed in the wood products manufacturing sector, with several million more jobs indirectly supported by the wood products sector. Many of these jobs are in rural areas where unemployment is high, especially among blue-collar workers.

$200,000 for University of Maine, Maine Lowbush Blueberry Sustainable Production and Processing Research: This research will support sustainable crop management research and innovations in processing to remain globally competitive with other fruits. Funding is critical to Maine's Wild Blueberry growers and processors that a strong research program supports sustainable crop management research and innovations in processing to remain globally competitive with other fruits.

$450,000 for University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Maine Potato Integrated Pest Management: This funding will promote agricultural economic development by helping IPM scientists track potential pest outbreaks and help provide growers with current information on specific and timely treatments in order to minimize the number of pesticide applications and maximize potato yield. Potatoes are the top agricultural commodity in the State of Maine.

$295,000 for the National Institute of Food and Agriculture NE Center for Invasive Plants, CT, ME, VT: Noxious invasive plants cause at least a $35 billion loss per year to the U.S. economy. The University of Connecticut and the University of Maine established a multi-state, interdisciplinary Center for Invasive Plants to address the problem. Using its strength in developing non-invasive ornamental plants, the Center will focus on novel strategies to manage problems caused by invasive plants that are economically and environmentally damaging to the Northeastern U.S. and to the nation as a whole. Use of pesticides to control invasive plants is undesirable and is often prohibited because of water quality restrictions. Non-toxic methods for controlling invasive plant species are needed to prevent reductions to crop yield.

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